

Former Thermal Plant, Nashville, Tennessee

In 1974, the first waste-to-energy facility in the United States opened as the Nashville Thermal plant began operations along the banks of the Cumberland River. This facility produced steam to heat and chilled water to cool downtown buildings, and was able to burn 1,000 tons of trash per day. A major fire occurred in 2002 that halted the burning of trash for a short time. In 2004, the facility was torn down as a new facility was built at another location. The site sat vacant from 2004 onward and its potential resurgence as a public open space prompted much conversation in the community as it was a prime piece of real estate along the downtown Nashville west riverbank. Numerous investigations of the former Thermal Plant site revealed the presence of arsenic, lead and polyaromatic hydrocarbons associated with the previous use of property.

In 2011, Metro Nashville and Davidson County officially identified the site as an important addition to the city's open space plan. In 2012, the South of Broadway Master Plan was commissioned, which reviewed the planning in downtown Nashville in the aftermath of the 2010 flood and the impending completion of the Music City Center convention center which occupied six blocks within the south portion of downtown. Through those two public processes, the highest and best use of the former thermal plant site was determined to be public open space. A concept plan was developed and in December 2013, a team was selected to move that vision forward. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservations' Division of Remediation provided review of the environmental assessments, technical advice on how to address any potential risk and ultimately reviewed and approved Metro's remedial work plans to guide redevelopment. In 2015, the 6,800 seat open-air amphitheater opened for performances; in addition to the amphitheater, there is green space, public art, and a greenway that connects city greenways and other parks in all directions from this pivotal location downtown.

Before (below) and after (right), the former thermal plant was transformed into an amphitheater and public green space downtown Nashville.

